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CHRISTIANITY APPLIED TO THE LIFE OF MEN AND OF NATIONS

The Essex Hall Lecture

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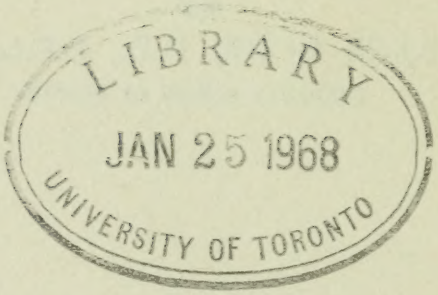

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THE Essex Hall Lecture was established with the object of providing an opportunity for the free utterance of the thoughts of a selected speaker on some religious theme of interest to serious minded people.

The first lecture was delivered in 1893 by the late Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, on 'The Development of Theology, as illustrated in English Poetry from 1780 to 1830.' 'The Relation of Jesus to his Age and our own,' by Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter; 'The Idea and Reality of Revelation,' by Professor H. H. Wendt; 'The Immortality of the Soul in the Poems of Tennyson and Browning,' by Sir Henry Jones; 'Religion and Life,' by Professor Rudolf Eucken; 'Heresy, its Ancient Wrongs and Modern Rights,' by the Rev. Alex. Gordon; 'The Religious Philosophy of Plotinus, and some Modern Philosophies of Religion,' by Dr. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's; 'The Place of Judaism Among the Religions of the World,' by Mr. Claude G. Montefiore—these are a few of the subjects of the lectures in past years.

The lecture by Bishop Gore on 'Christianity Applied to the Life of Men and of Nations,' when delivered, was warmly appreciated by the audience, and it is believed that a wider public will read it with interest.

ESSEX HALL, LONDON,
24 *June*, 1920.

CHRISTIANITY APPLIED TO THE LIFE OF MEN AND OF NATIONS

THE title of this lecture, as given above, was suggested to me by those responsible for the choice of the lecturer and was by me gladly accepted. But on reflection it suggests a possible misconception, the removal of which will carry me to the heart of my subject. It suggests that Christianity is something which can be conceived of as existing prior to its application to life—a philosophy or system of ideas, which can be accepted intellectually, and subsequently applied to life. But this is a fundamentally false way of thinking about Christianity. It is not first a philosophy or system of ideas. It is first a life. It is as St. Paul and St. John both call it, 'a word of life,'[1];

[1] Phil. ii. 16; 1 John i. 1.

i.e., a divine message to men about how to live—a message moreover enjoining a particular kind of life; 'the words of this life.'[1]

Again, Christianity was at first called 'the way'[2]: i.e., an authoritative direction how men ought to proceed who naturally 'love life and would fain see good days,' and who would fain escape the perils which beset life and attain 'salvation.' This fundamentally practical or moral and unspeculative conception of religion is, of course, characteristic of the Bible. It has its roots in the teaching of the Hebrew prophets who, I dare to reiterate, truly were, what St. Athanasius nobly calls them, 'the sacred school of the knowledge of God and of the spiritual life for all mankind.' They had no need, and no such speculative interest as would make it necessary for them for their own intellectual satisfaction, to prove the

[1] Acts v. 20.

[2] Acts ix. 2—men of the Way; xix. 9, 23; xxiv. 22; cf. ii. 28—the ways of life; xvi. 17—the way of salvation; Luke xx. 21—the way of God; John xiv. 6—I am the way; 2 Peter ii. 21—the way of righteousness.

existence of God. No one doubted that. No one moreover doubted that Jahveh was Israel's God, just as Chemosh was Moab's God. No one would have doubted that Jahveh could be relied upon to protect his own people, and to give them, by priest or seer, suitable directions in the practical difficulties of life. That was what was expected by every people of its God. There was no question of his casting off his people, for he naturally belonged to them and they to him. True it was that they had duties to Jahveh. Those duties were embodied in a traditional cultus. He must be given his sacrifices. The changes of the seasons must be observed with the appropriate feasts. His priests and seers must be given their dues. Things and practices which were understood to be reprehensible must be avoided, otherwise God would smite them. This was the Hebrew 'taboo.' But all this religion had little connection with morality as we understand it. It was commonly regarded as quite consistent with most kinds of

sexual immorality and with drunkenness, and with fraud and every kind of oppression of the poor. Such, as we should gather from the denunciations of the prophets and from the indications of the early historians, was the popular religion of Israel. It was a cultus rather than a way of life. The religion of the Canaanites and of the surrounding nations was some kind of nature worship, generally a worship of the productive or reproductive power of nature, which was indifferent as regards morality, or positively immoral; and the popular religion of Israel, both North and South, was assimilated to it. Besides this grossly-conceived worship of Jahveh there was in North and South a great deal of idolatry, that is the worship of the gods of other peoples, which the prophets alternately denounce and ridicule: but, for the most part, it probably did not seem to the people very different from their own worship. And religion, involving thus no deep and exacting moral claim, was thoroughly popular.

The people trampled Jahveh's courts. They loved to multiply their sacrifices and to make them abound. They loved the smell of the accompanying incense. They did not grudge the expense of religion so conceived. It was thus in a world so disposed towards religion that the prophets—that wonderful succession of inspired persons extending with more or less continuity over some four centuries—uttered their great protest and at last established in the heart of a reluctant people the moral principles which were in such violent contradiction of their inherited instinct. It must not be overlooked that the prophets had no idea of themselves as innovators in their teaching. They consistently proclaim the popular religion to be an apostasy from the true religion of Jahveh, as He had revealed himself to them at the time when He first established His covenant with Israel, after their great redemption from Egyptian bondage, at the hand of Moses: and truly I believe that you cannot account for the historical de-

velopment of Israel unless you acknowledge that the source of the prophetic message lay in the great founder, Moses, and that there at the root, in the covenant between Jahveh and Israel which Moses inaugurated, the moral conception of God and His claim is to be found. Nevertheless confessedly the people of Israel had overlaid this higher germ of teaching with baser matter, and the religion of Jahveh in Southern and largely in Northern Israel had been assimilated to the other Semitic worships. Thus the teaching of the prophets struck a note which was profoundly revolutionary and unpopular. They taught what the people resented as a new 'way.' All their cultus, so the prophets thundered, was of no use. Jahveh hated it. They had no right to rely upon Him whom they outraged. For He was a just and righteous being, who could only be pleased with a life and conduct like his own, with temperate and pure living, and above all with social justice and mercy to the poor and honesty in trade. And the prophets

gained their hard-won victory at last—at least in this sense, that for the Jews after the captivity and for the whole of our civilization (which has come under the religious tradition of Israel, as under the intellectual and artistic tradition of Greece, and the legal and governmental tradition of Rome) it has become a dogma, that is to say, a fundamental assumption, however constantly forgotten, that religion is a matter of the moral life first of all and not first of all a matter of speculative truth or ceremonial cultus. A religion, whether social or individual, which is non-moral, is recognized as an absurdity and superstition, which cannot declare itself in public amongst us—however deep it lies, unextirpated, in the subconscious and secret regions of human nature. This assumption is due to the Hebrew prophets.

It must never be forgotten then that Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord, assumed the prophetic message as divine, and took His stand upon it, as it had just been renewed in the powerful mission of

John the Baptist. There had been, indeed, much need for its renewal. The old kind of idolatry which the prophets had denounced had been buried once for all in the deep waters of the captivity. Israel emerged pure from the tendency to worship other gods than the one God, Jahveh, the creator of all that is, and the supreme governor and judge of all men everywhere: and their traditional cultus had been reformed, under the mighty impulse of the prophetic teaching, till it had forgotten what St. Chrysostom calls 'its origin in pagan grossness,' and had become, as we see it in the Book of Psalms, an instrument for the expression of the religion of the prophets. Nevertheless, the prophets would have been profoundly disappointed with the outcome of these reforms as shown in the Pharisaic religion of Our Lord's time. If 'to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God' was the true summary of divine requirement, and the 'conclusion of the whole matter' in religion, apparently

they would have seen little of it. So our Lord, in the spirit of the old prophets and in succession to John the Baptist, denounced the avarice of the leaders of religion, which He called mammon-worship—the new idolatry—and their hypocrisy and externalism, their selfishness, their insolence, their injustice, their lack of mercy. He denounced their religion as a perversion of the truth. They have made the word of God of none effect by their traditions. He denounced upon them, again like the old prophets, the judgment of God as upon an apostate race. Meanwhile He calls out and educates in the heart of this obstinate people the sacred 'remnant,' the true Israel, 'my church,' and to these His disciples he teaches the true religion—'the way of God in truth.' It is the way of humility and detachment, of meekness and purity, of justice and love, of sympathy and sacrifice. Its special characteristic is that it refuses to characterize the sins which make people disreputable as worse than those sins of the spirit

which are quite consistent with respectability. No one, in fact, can read the Gospels with any attention and then affirm that in the mind of Jesus fornication or drunkenness are worse sins than avarice or pride or unbrotherliness or contempt of others or the externalism which he calls hypocrisy.

And religion, as Jesus sets it before men, is indisputably a manner of life—'a way.' I do not mean by this that it has not a strictly theological background. It certainly has. The Son of Man, the true master of human life, knew assuredly that, whatever the inconsistencies which present themselves between men's theory and their practice, yet in the long run how men will behave towards their fellow men will depend upon what, at the bottom, they really believe about God. Accordingly he renewed in the minds of men the awful sense of divine justice, and of the boundless ruin which indulged sin cannot but work, and of the wrath of God upon injustice and cruelty and neglect of the weak. The

God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, as He presents Him, is as far as possible from the ' good natured ' God, who will ' make it all right at the last,' which is the idol of popular imagination to-day. Thus our Lord's teaching is a renewal of the old stern prophetic teaching. But He emphasized with a quite new emphasis the love of God, whom He taught us to call our Father—His intense and personal love for every individual, especially for every one 'labouring and heavy laden,' outcast and oppressed. There was, in fact, nothing which Jesus Our Master laboured more earnestly to do than to plant ineradicably in men's mind the true picture of the personality and character of God. And as I am specially instructed that I stand upon a platform of free speech, so, without apology, I say that, in His teaching about God, He so spoke of Himself as the Son with the Father, and of the Divine Spirit whom He was to send upon His disciples, as to imply the theology which St. Paul and St. John made more explicit, the theology

of the Holy Trinity and of the Incarnation. I do not think that, without doing violence to historical evidence of the most cogent kind, we can deny that Jesus so presented Himself to men and so spoke of Himself, as to make the theological interpretation of the personality of God and of His own personality which the Christian church has embodied in its creeds, the legitimate interpretation. But at this moment it is the order of the two elements of practice and theory that I am insisting upon. I insist that what He offers to men is not first a doctrine about God and the unseen world to be apprehended by the intellect, and afterwards, it may be, applied to the life. It is the opposite. It is a life which He teaches, a way of living to which He points men, which involves or is based upon a theology. And to this order of emphasis the apostolic writers conform. There is a theology implied, no doubt, in the Epistle of James: but avowedly the emphasis is on the true religion as a way of life. By no man has this 'way'

been more beautifully presented. It is a religion whose characteristic *cultus*, or worship, is to lie in works of mercy and unworldly purity of life.[1] There is, no doubt, much more explicit theology in St. Paul than in St. James. It is his function to establish the intellectual principles of the universal religion, both on the basis of Judaism and with the help of Hellenism, but also as against Judaism and against Hellenism, so far as they appeared as rivals. There is much therefore of intellectual argument in St. Paul. Nevertheless, I affirm that St. Paul's emphasis remained true. His primary object, pursued under immense difficulties, was to build up and fortify the new converts, pagan in origin for the most part, in the way of good living wherein alone they could have fellowship with God. Neither knowledge of God, however profound, nor faith, however fervent, nor spiritual gifts, however brilliant, could avail to make a man of any account at all in God's sight, but love only, that is the spirit

[1] James i. 27.

of real brotherhood. Once more, for all St. John's insistence upon orthodoxy about Christ, the emphasis is with him the same. Where love is God is: and where love is not God is not: and in the love of the brethren—the spirit of brotherhood—is the only possible evidence to the world or to the man's own conscience of either the knowledge or the love of God.

To this idea of the religion of Jesus Christ as 'the life' and 'the way,' the Christian church of the first centuries was splendidly faithful. I do not mean that it was indifferent to theology. On the contrary, it showed an astonishingly true perception of the theological principles involved in its faith. It made a magnificent fight, for instance, for the true moral idea of God, the Creator of all that is and the judge of all rational and free beings, against the *merely* 'immanent God' of Platonic stoicism, which had almost become at the time 'the religion of all sensible men.' Moreover I do not know in history any instance of a corporate

mind in a scattered society of persons so surprisingly vivid and intense as is to be found in the Christian church of the second century, in the midst of its struggles to maintain its true character against the multitudinous forms of popular gnosticism, and that too before it was equipped with any ecumenical creed or canon of scriptures. The church is already able to behave like a person under vigorous cross-questioning —'Do you mean this?' 'Can you deny that?' 'Are you prepared for such a conclusion?'—giving answers, making mistakes in haste and correcting them at leisure, and gradually clearing up its mind and elaborating its terminology. But through all this process of theological controversy, though it is what we hear most of in the literature of the period, the primacy of the moral aim of the Christian religion was safeguarded by one fact. The church was viewed with profound suspicion and dislike, as the enemy of society, and it was constantly liable to persecution. No one could become a Christian with-

out realizing that he was embarking on a great adventure, and risking his life or his position in society. Thus the resultant society was, not indeed at all morally perfect, but a society which really 'sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,' and which responded to the claim of self-control and self-sacrifice as a matter of course. Dr. Dobschütz, Dr. Harnack, and others have recently given us the result of exhaustive enquiries into the moral condition of the early church, on which Dr. Inge has recently made interesting and appreciative remarks. I feel no doubt they are right. St. Paul's Epistles suggest that grave moral dangers beset the apostolic church at its start, as the Hellenic world with its non-moral or immoral tradition was pouring into it. But the church righted itself. It kept the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, now their own prophets. It glorified the moral law. Moreover, it was magnificently true to the fundamentally social character of its religion. It knew what it meant by

being a brotherhood. Its circumstances indeed forced it to develop this idea into its practical consequences. For the Christians found themselves in large measure exiled from the common civic and industrial life of the empire. This was in part because its civic life and its industries were so largely bound up with idolatrous ceremonies and formulas from which the Christians abstained with puritanical emphasis. In part because they were (as the Apocalypse informs us) boycotted alike in respect of trade and of general intercourse. It was the law of the persecuting empire, the 'beast' of the Apocalypse, that no men who would not do it homage and receive its mark 'on their right hand or their forehead' should be able to buy or sell. Thus the Christians had to fashion a new industrial life for themselves. They had to develop practical economic principles. And they were frankly socialistic in spirit. Every man is to be a worker: 'If a man will not work neither let him eat.' Every man, as far as possible, is to be

provided with work by the community, and is to do it industriously. Every one who cannot find work, or is too old or infirm to do it, is to be supported by the alms of the community. Those who have more than enough for their own needs are to give it to the community for those who need. The claim which the church preachers press upon the rich in respect of their wealth sounds almost communistic. God's justice is constantly interpreted to mean equality of opportunity, or an equal supply to each of what he needs to live upon and no more. This language, however, must not be misinterpreted. The Christians were yet utterly remote from any relation to the empire in which they could influence legislation. Their communism was purely voluntary. And though there is evidence that they were sometimes taken in, and that there were some who urged the danger of indiscriminate charity, yet, on the whole, the moral level was so well maintained by the peril involved in becoming a Christian, that 'charity' was saved

from being 'indiscriminate.' Within the sphere of state law moreover the Christian fathers recognize that in a fallen world the principle of private property and laws for its protection are absolutely necessary. Only they would doubtless have insisted that human law must be kept as carefully as possible on the lines of, and at the service of, the deeper 'natural' law of divine justice.

I should exceed the limits of a lecture if I tried to fill in, with the sporadic details of evidence which we possess, this picture of the brotherhood life of the early church. It really represents the ideal of Christ practically realized. The new commandment of love to the brethren as St. John said, proved itself 'true' that is actually real in experience. It made the rich poorer and the poor better off, as St. James already saw.[1] It is a beautiful and reassuring picture which history presents to us. And it suggested wonderful thoughts and anticipations of the reform of the world which Christianity would work when it

[1] James i. 9-10.

had passed to the place of power and could control the politics of nations. There would be no more war, said St. Athanasius. Such a thing would be inconceivable between Christian nations. He dared to give this abolition of war as a proof of the divinity of Christ! There could under Christianity be no more compulsion to believe, or persecution of those who did not follow the state religion, says Lactantius, for Christianity cannot, by its very principle, enlist force on behalf of truth. Christian teachers might indeed have drawn a picture of society, as it would be when Christianity was the religion of the world, glowing with bright colours which were but copied from past experience. But they left out of their reckoning one most important consideration. They forgot that when it ceased to cost men anything to become Christian, their Christianity would cease to count for much in their lives. As the popularity of Christianity increased, the moral descent was, in fact, extraordinarily rapid. Chrysostom's ser-

mons, Augustine's sermons, Salvian on the Government of God—dating from less than 100 years after the last persecution—suggest a Christian world not much better than ours on the average. Jump two centuries, and the world of the 'converted' Franks, as it is presented to us by Gregory of Tours, suggests barbarism unashamed. For all the splendid moral and social principles which the mediæval church and the great schoolmen inherited from the Christian Fathers and the New Testament and from the stoic Platonism of the empire, and which they formulated so faithfully as abstract principles—for all the educative control which the Catholic Church succeeded in exercising over a half barbarous world in the depth of the middle age—for all the work which Christianity did in maintaining the sanctity of the home and the standard of right and wrong in private and public, in national and international life, I cannot bring myself to deny that, as soon as Christianity became the accepted religion or the

obligatory religion of nations, the total impression of the moral level becomes a dark one, relieved though it be by even brilliant patches of light. Thus the saints are always in evidence and are always a power in society. There are radiant and apparently true pictures of great recoveries of moral level in whole societies effected by their influence. There is a steady influence of Christianity in all that concerns the home, and under certain conditions a surprising success in moralizing the principles of trade. In the life of the celibate communities of men and women there was a magnificent witness to what Christianity under special conditions is capable of. In politics and in international politics the church, the supreme supernational fellowship and authority, had a real influence. And yet—and yet . . . what life is on the average, what is acquiesced in, that is tolerated 'to avoid worse things,' or because otherwise the world would become apostate, is profoundly depressing. The church viewed on the whole has appar-

ently done the very thing most plainly opposed to the method and spirit of Christ; it has sacrificed reality to numbers; it has been captivated by the passion for power in the kingdoms of the world; on the largest scale it has done what our Lord always refused to do—it has compromised its moral principles for the sake of the apparently expedient.

There are perhaps three great causes which facilitated this process of moral compromise.

1. The influence of Hellenic intellectualism. The church used nobly the philosophy of Greece to enable it to express in intellectual terms the theology which it inherited from St. Paul and St. John—a theology, I believe, which is essentially Christian, grown upon the root of Hebrew prophecy and Christ's own teaching and person, and by no means borrowed from Hellenism. And for this formulation no doubt Greek philosophy supplied an admirable instrument and terminology. But the Hellenic spirit in Christianity became

intoxicated by its own intellectualism. The intellectual formulæ of orthodoxy became to it so supremely important an element in religion that the religion itself became intellectualized. It became less and less a life and more and more a philosophy or a system of correct formulas. The dominant claim upon the Christian became the claim of orthodoxy. The great struggle of the Church became the struggle for orthodoxy, in which the claims of love and mutual consideration and brotherhood were too lamentably forgotten. The Eastern church became the orthodox church, and everything was forgiven for orthodoxy's sake. Broadly speaking this is written in the history, though, to make the picture complete, a good deal would have to be written by way of modification.

2. We must take account of the Romanization of the Western church. To an extent that it is difficult to exaggerate the Roman genius for government, the genius which Virgil describes in immortal lines—

Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento...
Parcere dejectis et debellare superbos

passed from the empire to the church. When Western Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries describe the empire as preparing the way for the church, they think of the church (and that tends to mean the church which acknowledges the sovereignty of Rome) as succeeding to the position of empire. The Roman church exhibited no properly theological genius: but it exhibited a marvellous power of using dogma as an instrument of government. From that point of view orthodoxy cannot be made too much of, and cannot be too inflexible. 'Truth,' says the Roman Leo, 'which is one and simple does not admit of any variety.' It was no doubt an overwhelming gain in the cause of the church when the Franks embraced orthodoxy instead of Arianism. The church eagerly welcomed this gain, present and prospective, and (in this and many like instances) paid the price involved by accepting for baptism masses of really unconverted

men. It is true that, within the monastic system, under the inspiration of reforms constantly renewed, beginning with that of the glorious St. Benedict, zeal for the true life was never forgotten. Nor even in the world outside was true Christianity ever out of sight. Nevertheless, on the whole the true 'way of life' almost retires into the monasteries, and for men living in the rough world, inasmuch as real conversions are not apparently to be expected, very much that is not Christian is conceded, if only they will remain obedient children of the church. Obedience to ordinances takes the place of the following of the life. The distinction is emphasized between the 'ecclesia docens,' the sacerdotal authority, and the 'ecclesia discens,' including the mass of the laity, which is simply to accept the teaching of authority, which it cannot and must not criticize, and to submit to the specified requirements which are by no means onerous. And, granted this submission, salvation is guaranteed on very easy terms. Now to a few

men in every age, and to many men in some ages, the mere acceptance of dogma without enquiry, or in despite of reason, is an impossible burden; but to most men in most ages it is an easy and welcome thing to accept religion on authority, if it does not in practice ask much of them. Thus the system has succeeded over great periods of history in keeping masses of men within the church, but at the cost of almost obliterating its moral witness. The history of Western Christendom, both in barbarous and civilized times, both before and after the Reformation, outside the convents has presented a very easy toleration of human infirmities, provided that there was a frank submission to the authority of the church and of its dogma.

3. Besides the church Hellenized and the church Romanized we have to consider the church nationalized. This was a special product of the Reformation. The idea of a visible catholic unity, which kept the religious life of each nation in touch with a larger

whole, was perforce weakened or abandoned in those nations which rejected the Roman obedience and were by the Roman authority condemned and excommunicated. For them the formative idea became that of the national church, and nowhere has that been seen in greater force than in our own country. The idea of the national church, most reluctantly abandoned even when facts were manifestly too strong for it, was that all the citizens were to belong to it. Citizenship and churchmanship were to be combined in one. Even though the events of the Reformation had struck a blow at the principle of dogmatic authority, and Englishmen came to be utterly intolerant of ecclesiastical discipline, yet conformity to the national church, without too anxious enquiry as to the source of its authority, was to impart to the nation a religious unity and to sanctify the common life. It did this in a measure—mainly by the translation of the Bible, and the place which the Bible came to occupy in the reverence and affection of

Englishmen. But it involved a terrible prostitution of sacred Christian ordinances, and the great language that accompanies them. For these ordinances, Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Communion, embody a spiritual language which implies a tremendous moral claim, and the use of these ordinances and this language without any corresponding claim through long generations generated a situation as remote from the intentions of Christ as can well be conceived. In particular the whole social system of the country—' the rich man in his castle, the poor man at the gate '—the whole industrial system with all its notorious and grinding injustice, the whole legal and penal system with all its preference for the claims of property to the claims of personality—all was accepted as the national system. But, setting aside for the moment the inherent supernationalism of Christianity, can anyone deny that a system which has caused infants to be baptized as a matter of course, and which has kept men in the church with little claim on

them beyond the most occasional conformity to religious ordinances and obedience to the law of the land is as remote from the method of the Christ as any system that can be imagined. And if it be pleaded that the system may be 'better than nothing' for the mass of men by keeping them in some sort of conscious allegiance to Christ, I should deny the plea. I do not think it is better for the mass of men to take themselves for Christians without serious moral effort. But, apart from this, how can it be believed that such a method could commend itself to One who dared to go forward with His full moral claim —who dared to proclaim and insist upon the true life—even though He saw clearly that the nation He loved would not accept it, and were manifestly being made worse by having it so clearly set before them? What moral teacher of men ever showed less anxiety to commend himself to majorities? The method of the established church as we have known it in England seems to me the very antithesis of the method of Christ.

All these three deflections from or perversions of the method of Christ have produced the same results by themselves and in their manifold combinations. That has been the weakening of the corporate moral witness of the church. Christianity as it has appeared in European society might be commonly regarded as a dogmatic system, true or false; or as a system of ecclesiastical government to be submitted to for the sake of ultimate salvation; or as a national system to be more or less conformed to for the general good. But it certainly has not appeared as the organized life of a brotherhood so startling from the point of view of ordinary human selfishness that, even if it excited keen hostility, it must at any rate arrest attention as a bright light in a dark place; it certainly has not appeared as something which could purify society like salt, by its distinctive and emphatic savour, nor as something clearly in view and distinct in outline like 'a city set on a hill.' There has been on the largest scale what

the Germans call *verweltlichung*—secularization—which has fused the world and the church and almost destroyed the church's moral witness. Not indeed in all respects. In sexual matters, in the maintenance of the marriage law and the sanctity of the home, against swearing, against violence, against drunkenness, against theft, in favour of the Sunday as a day of rest, Christianity has been clearly understood to bear a moral witness and make an inexorable moral claim; but it appears entirely to have forgotten the fundamental moral principle of our Lord that disreputable sins—the sins of the flesh, of hot blood and violent impulse—are nowise worse than the sins consistent with social respectability, than avarice and the love of money, pride and exclusiveness and unbrotherliness and contempt. This principle of Jesus has been ignored in an astonishing way. Thus it has come about that the witness of established Christianity to the principles of justice and brotherhood has been lamentably and inconceivably weak. Such books as

Mr. Hammond's on *The Town Labourer* and *The Village Labourer* and *The Skilled Labourer* make one's blood boil and cause one to hide one's face with shame. And the older among us experience the same sensations without going beyond our own memories. I can recall the attitude of the church as a whole in the seventies towards the movement of Joseph Arch on behalf of the agricultural labourer.

To-day we are witnessing a very widespread revolt, both among men and women, against Christianity as it is represented in the organized Christian churches. (i.) This is partly an intellectual and rationalistic revolt, which seems to me often strangely ignorant and misled; but with that I am not now concerned. (ii.) There is also, I cannot doubt, a wide movement of revolt, which the war has deepened and broadened, against the very strict law which Christ laid on the sexual impulses of men and women. But with this again I am not at this moment concerned. (iii.) There is thirdly a passionate feeling of contempt

and repudiation of the churches on the part of a great body of the workers and of morally serious people, not of what we call (unfortunately) the labouring class, who have awakened to the real meaning of justice and despise the traditional palliations of manifest wrong—whose cry is 'not charity, but justice.' This is perhaps the most important movement of our time, and its claim against the church is overwhelming and unanswerable on the whole. On the other hand there are a number of thoughtful people who watch the democratic movement, and see in it such symptoms of the same vices as have caused aristocracy and plutocracy to become tyrannical and selfish and morally rotten, that they view its future with profound anxiety and see in the principles of Christ, rightly understood and reinterpreted, the only real hope for society. Thinking of salvation rather as social than as individual, they are prepared to say: 'There is none other name under heaven given among men wherein we can be saved, save the name of Jesus Christ.'

What are such men to do? It is quite plain that we need a fresh start. We need to reconsider our principles. I am not speaking of the study of economics, as generally understood. That is a more or less scientific and departmental study. I am not speaking of politics which concern the applying of our principles through Parliamentary or other organized action. I am thinking of the fundamental reconsideration of the principles of Christianity considered as 'the way' and 'the life' and 'the brotherhood.' It will involve the recognition that on the largest scale we have 'made the word of God of none effect by our tradition'; that we have acquiesced in a widespread ignoring of the real meaning of justice; that we have countenanced the exploitation of the weak, and a monstrous and groundless theory of the rights of property which enabled men to ignore the welfare of the community, and to care for property more than persons; and that our systems of housing, employment, and education have ignored the indisput-

ably Christian principle that every soul has in the sight of God and of the church (when right-minded) an equal value, and the same really divine claim to equal consideration.

On the basis of such a profound act of repentance, or change of mind as to what Christianity means, we must reorganize the Christian moral witness. To a large extent this has been already done. I dare to refer to the Report of our Anglican Archbishops' Committee on Christianity and Industrial problems[1] as giving a good lead. The enquiry has in fact been fairly thorough. The materials are ready. They need presentation in a form easily intelligible with the significant warning 'This is what the Christian life really means.' Do not let us deceive ourselves. It will not be popular. That, I believe, real Christianity has never been, and probably never will be. It will not be popular in 'labour' any more than in capitalist circles. It will be recognized that any really true and

[1] Published by S.P.C.K.

distinctive presentation of the principles of Christian living and Christian brotherhood, made vivid and intelligible, and applied under modern conditions, must claim a profound change, not only in the region of the external arrangements of our social and industrial life, but even more in the region of our prejudices and presuppositions—our inherited tradition. I can imagine that if our Christian pulpits, as a whole, really, systematically and intelligibly taught what divine justice and Christian brotherhood demand, and what divine justice and Christian brotherhood require us strongly and in the name of God to condemn, there would be a considerable secession from the organized churches on the part of those who are content to be as they have been. They would not wish to put themselves constantly in the way of what they do not mean to accept. But tradition is quite as strong and hard to break down among clergy and teachers as among the laity. The majority of pulpits will, I dare say, be

more anxious to avoid offence than to proclaim the truth. Nevertheless, I feel sure that there is a great host of Christians, priests and prophets and people, who are prepared for a great change, and have indeed already inaugurated it. These must be drawn together to reconstitute the moral witness of the church. In this direction I see the most hopeful line of progress towards the reunion of our divided Christendom. I am not very hopeful at present of reunion on the basis of theological agreement and of ecclesiastical organization. That is in the somewhat far future. But here and now, without any compromise of divergent principles, we could draw together those of all churches who really believe in the principles which inspire and interpret democracy at its best, and believe also that those principles are fundamentally principles of Christ, and that in His name only can effect really be given to them. It is not enough to draw together central committees in London to say what requires to be said. It is necessary to

start locally, in every town large or small, and, if it may be, in the country districts also, to get all the local congregations to appoint representatives, and to organize them as a body capable of representing all who name the name of Christ, from Roman Catholics to Unitarians, both Anglicans and Free Churchmen. Such a body, in correspondence with all the other like bodies, should be able to consider what Christian principles really are and what line the society of Christ ought to take in local affairs, in support of more or less zealous local authorities and in conflict, if need be, with negligent authorities.[1] The association in this sort of aim of ministers and members of all Christian denominations one with another would indirectly have the immense advantage of bringing them a good deal together and making them know one another and work

[1] The formation and affiliation of such local inter-denominational bodies is the work of the Christian Social Crusade, to which the chairman of the meeting at which the above lecture was delivered had already referred. For information, address The Secretary, 92, St. George's Square, London, S.W. 1.

together. It would advertise in every district the true interpretation of Christianity as a way of life; and it might become a new revelation to the country and especially to 'labour' that the churches are capable of effective union upon a plane which they can thoroughly appreciate. If it did not make Christianity more popular, it would make it more intelligible and more respected, even it might be feared.

The Dean of St. Paul's is constantly exhorting us clergy not to suffer ourselves to become court chaplains to king Demos. No doubt unfaithfulness to our Lord has led us in the past to be court chaplains to kings and autocracies and plutocracies, and may lead us to minister similarly to Soviets. But if we will be fairly faithful, I see no risk of our being too acceptable. When our Lord came on earth, not only had He to meet the opposition of the great interests, ecclesiastical, political and financial, but also He was deserted and repudiated by 'the common people,' who at first had heard Him gladly, and

that, in part because He would not fall in with the current Nationalism. That was not His ideal. The movement He sought to stir was of a deeper sort. 'Seek first the reign of God and his righteousness.' So He was rejected. If we indulge in impossible dreams and suppose Him to have come in the flesh here in England to-day, would it not have been the same thing? Would He not have met the same hostility 'in the classes,' and the same indifference in 'the masses'? Would not the disciples have been few? I am not afraid, at any rate, that faithful teaching of 'the way' will ever expose us to the perils of excessive popularity, though I think it will identify us with the principles of the Labour movement at its best.

There is one other great department of the moral principles of Christianity which is too important to be ignored. I mean its supernationalism or catholicity. I have already noticed that the rejection of Christ by the Jews was due in a measure to His refusal of their nationalism. Nationalism in all its

various moods, whether Pharisaic or Zealot or Sadducean, was an offence to Him. He sought a reign of God more deeply divine and more broadly human. He proclaimed the inevitable destruction of the Jewish city and temple, and bade His disciples see in this blow, so desolating to a Jewish heart, the prelude of the great redemption. No doubt St. Paul in vindicating so stoutly the catholicity of Christianity was the real interpreter of the mind of Christ. Nevertheless the narrow patriotism, which refuses to look beyond the limits of the race or nation, is an obstinate element in human nature. It turned the first Christian community of Jerusalem, which was so enthusiastic in brotherhood so long as all the 'brethren' were Jews, into the bitterest opponents of St. Paul's crusade on behalf of catholic brotherhood. Later Syrian and Egyptian and African nationalism played a great part in promoting the early schisms in the Church, Nestorian, Monophysite, Donatist. It was in the drawing apart of Rome and

Constantinople, of the Eastern and Western Empires, that we must find the most fundamental cause of the Great Schism. Finally, nationalism took the opportunity of the cry of the Reformation, utterly to break up the catholic fellowship of Christendom and to establish the idol of unmitigated national sovereignty, as it has been the basis of the international politics of the Europe that we have known. In the great war we seemed to have our eyes opened to our perils. Our statesmen, of all schools and parties, proclaimed the League of Nations as the only way of escape from the destruction of our civilization, and they proclaimed the need of a new spirit, a supernational spirit, in the tones of Joseph Mazzini, the greatest prophet of modern democracy. Nevertheless, now after eighteen months of armistice and peace (so called) we see such meagre signs of any new spirit in the nations that we are almost in despair. And what deeply aggravates the distress in some of us, is that, if we compare the tone of our pulpits in

advocating the war with its tone in advocating the remedy against war—the supernational spirit and organization—we cannot but recognize that it is as boiling water to tepid. On the whole, in spite of the utterances of great Christian teachers, there has been but a weak and languid support provided by the churches which name the name of Christ for the movement which declares that 'patriotism is not enough.'

Yet there is no mistaking the mind of Christ. There can be no reasonable doubt that He condemns our narrow patriotism, and calls us forward to the larger vision. And though the League of Nations would not be the reunion of the church, yet an alliance of still separated churches to further and strengthen the League of Nations would be a great step towards religious reunion. Supernationalism in politics would promote catholicism in religion, just as mere nationalism in politics has betrayed us into an easy acquiescence in the ideals of a merely national religion.

There are other departments of our

common life, besides those I have mentioned, in which a fresh appreciation and application of Christian moral or social principles is peremptorily needed. Thus I should have liked to dwell upon the application of Christian principles to the relation of the stronger white races and nations to those of other colours and traditions who are in part committed to our tutelage, and in part are asserting themselves as our equals in commerce and empire, and I should have liked to press the universal claim of the Christian gospel as the necessary basis for the fellowship of man. I should have liked to endeavour to apply Christian principles to what we speak of broadly as the movement for the emancipation of women. Once more I should have liked to emphasize the urgent need there is for a reconsideration of what the religion of Christ really means in its interpretation of the relation of man and woman both in marriage and outside the marriage union, and in the claim which it makes upon that singularly tempestuous ele-

ment in human nature—the sexual passions.

On a different field I should have wished to examine philosophically the claim of pragmatism to affirm the moral values of Christianity while denying their theological and philosophical implications. And, again on a different field, I should have wished to estimate the importance of the reaction which has shown itself in the field of New Testament criticism towards an apocalyptic interpretation of original Christianity; because this interpretation of Christianity, though it has been pushed to absurd lengths, both contains, I think, a large element of truth, and also has a very important bearing on the nature of the Christian moral witness, and the whole attitude of the church toward the world. But to do these things would plainly require not a lecture but a course of lectures, and I must content myself with a bare mention of them.

My point is this. Christianity involves a theology, but it is first of all a life, a life for the individual soul, and a

social life—the life of a brotherhood, the Church. It is first of all as a life, visible and intense, that it is to inform the consciences of men and make its appeal to them. If this is always true, it is, it seems to me, especially important to-day, when the constructive intellect is weak and the spirit of scepticism widespread, but the sense of moral need and the cry for practical guidance is deep and urgent. And I am persuaded that there is no task to which the Church of Christ, in the largest sense, should more insistently devote itself than to the task of reinterpreting, reapplying, and reinforcing its moral and social meaning. Let it make 'the old commandment' to love one another once again 'a new commandment,' and let us give all men to understand that Christianity is a life before it is a theology.

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